



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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**Forced recruitment of a child soldier by KNLA in
Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District, October 2015
(Updated)**

This News Bulletin describes the forced recruitment of a child soldier by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District. A 43-year-old woman from A--- village, known as Naw A---, reported to a KHRG community member that her youngest son, Saw E---, was recruited by the KNLA in 2013, when he was 16 years old. As her son did not want to be a soldier, she reported the case to the village head and asked the local KNLA base for his release. Nonetheless, there has been no action taken by the KNLA. As a result of her son's forced recruitment, Naw A--- also faces livelihood difficulties, since she lives with only one of her daughters and she needs her son to be released so he can help them with their livelihood needs.¹

This News Bulletin also includes updated information from October 2016 including further details from both the soldier's mother and the KNLA. The soldier's mother issued an apology to the KNLA and KNU after they explained the situation of her son's recruitment to her.

On October 3rd 2015, a KHRG community member met with Naw A---, a 43-year-old woman from A--- village, Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District. She has five children. Three of her children are married and are all living with their own families now. Currently, she lives with only one of her daughters in the same household.

Naw A--- reported to the KHRG community member that on January 1st 2013, a Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) member² named Hpah Loo Tha came to her house along with a few of his fellow KNLA members and persuaded her youngest son, Saw E---, who

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Dooplaya District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It was received by KHRG in October 2015. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. For additional reports categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's website.

² Naw A--- did not know the exact positions of the KNLA members mentioned in this report.

was 16 years old, to go and stay with him at the KNLA base in Kyainseikgyi Township in order to look after a sick couple. Her son did not want to go and stay at the KNLA base, and he did not want to be a soldier, either. Nevertheless, Saw E--- followed Hpah Loo Tha because Hpah Loo Tha told them that Saw E--- would only have to stay at the KNLA base for three or four days, and then he would be sent home. However, Saw E--- was not sent back as Hpah Loo Tha promised, and instead was forcefully recruited as a soldier.

Initially, Saw E--- was assigned to the KNLA base in Noh Maw Poo village, in Kyainseikgyi Township, but was later transferred. Naw A--- reported that she does not know the KNLA company³ number that her son Saw E--- has to serve for, but the local people refer to that company as Hsa Bleh Htoo's Company and it is based in Wa Ma village, Kyainseikgyi Township, Dooplaya District.

Three or four days after Saw E--- was taken away, his mother met with Hpah Loo Tha and a group of KNLA members from the Kyainseikgyi Township KNLA base and asked for her son to be released. The KNLA members refused to release him and said to her, *"Don't worry about your son. He is doing okay."* A few weeks later, Saw E---'s older sister, who lives together with their mother, also followed up on his situation by going to the KNLA base to find out whether he had signed a contract to serve as a KNLA soldier. When she found out that he had not signed anything yet, she stayed at the base for a week to make sure he did not sign any contract. After she left the base, the same group of KNLA members that previously met her mother came to their house and told the mother, *"Your son was forced to sign a contract by people coercing him to drink alcohol until he was drunk."* With this contract, Saw E--- committed to seven years of service.

Naw A--- added that after a year, the Kyainseikgyi Township KNLA base allowed her son to visit them, and her son visited them a couple of times. On October 3rd 2015, she told a KHRG community member that she has not seen her son in 2015, yet, and she is worried for him and is very upset about the situation. A week later, she informed KHRG that her son finally came back to visit her, for the first time this year. Naw A--- reported that her son always told her that he does not want to be a soldier, and even after he was forced to become one, he continued to ask her to help him be free. Nonetheless, the KNLA people in charge have not discharged him, as yet.

³ Military unit of approximately 100 soldiers.

According to the non-governmental organisation Geneva Call,⁴ on July 21st 2013, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the KNLA signed the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict.⁵ This commitment was meant to affirm and broaden the scope of a previous agreement the KNU had signed with UNICEF in March 2007, which prohibited the use and recruitment of children in the organisation. The recruitment of Saw E--- at the age of 16 against his will and Hsa Bleh Htoo's Company's refusal to release him is in direct violation of these commitments, as well as KNLA's own Military Law and Rules.

Saw E---'s forced recruitment not only negatively impacts his own life, but Naw A--- also reported that since her son has been taken away, she has faced hardships with gaining her livelihood. She and her daughter are farming on a hill farm for a living, and it is difficult for them to do all the required work on their own. They need a man to help them with clearing the hill field, looking for firewood, fixing the roof, and other physically demanding livelihood activities.

Naw A--- and her daughter have been asking their relatives, neighbours, and village leaders to help them free Saw E---, but no progress has been made. She asked the A--- village head, Naw H---, to help her with contacting Company Commander Hsa Bleh Htoo in order to ask him to discharge her son, but she said it appeared as if they do not take her demand seriously, and do not care about her son's case. For this reason, when she met with a KHRG community member, she has asked KHRG to help her son be released and be able to come home, so he can be free and help them with their livelihoods.

Update, October 4, 2016

After KHRG had published the information about this incident on the KHRG website and the KHRG members met with the KNU's headquarter leaders on this particular forced recruitment case, KHRG learned that the KNU carried out an investigation by sending letters requesting action on the case to both district and township level KNU and KNLA's leaders.

KHRG learned that when the boy first was recruited, he was around 16 years old but when KHRG documented the case, the boy was around 19 years old at the time of the report.

⁴ Geneva Call is a neutral and impartial non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting respect by armed non-State actors for international humanitarian norms in armed conflict and other situations of violence, in particular those related to the protection of civilians. For further information, see "[Who are we](#)," *Geneva Call*.

⁵ For further details regarding the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment signed by the KNU see, "[The KNU/KNLA commits to the protection of children and the prohibition of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence](#)," *Geneva Call*, July 2013.

As of December 2015, a KHRG community member met with the boy's mother in A--- village, Kyainseikgyi Township, Doooplaya District. She told a KHRG community member that her son has been now released by the KNLA and he returned to her to help her with some of her work and repair the house for her. She is very happy now because her son stays beside her.

Regarding what she had reported about the case earlier, she told a KHRG community member that, *"In the beginning, I mistakenly reported the case because I had not seen him [my son]. When people [KNLA] came and asked my son to follow them, I thought he [my son] might come back the next morning or afternoon. Since he had not come back, I mistakenly reported the case. I got angry a little bit. I'm very happy now because my son comes back and stays beside me. He helps me with some of my work. I feel better now. I feel fine after I met and talked with the leaders [of KNLA]. In the beginning, I blamed them because I had not met them. I feel better now because when I met with the leaders, they explained to me the detailed information [about my son]."*

As her son has been released, she stated that she sincerely apologises to the KNU and KNLA for what she had reported earlier; she reported the case because she was not consulted and informed on the detailed information of her son recruitment. She stated to a KHRG community member that,

"I do not know what to say. I sincerely apologise to the upper leaders [KNU's headquarters]. In the beginning, I mistakenly blamed the mother organisation [KNU] a little bit so please ... forgive me and things will be fine and not making problems for us."

However, Naw A--- told a KHRG community member that her son asked her for permission to continue and join the KNLA because he had already attended military training and he is now around 20 years old although she is not sure of his exact age. Therefore, she allowed her son to join KNLA again.

Further background reading on the situation in Doooplaya District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Fighting between Tatmadaw and DKBA soldiers along the Asian Highway displaces villagers in Doooplaya District, July 2015," (September 2015)
- "Doooplaya Interview: Saw A---, April 2014," (August 2015)
- "Doooplaya Incident Report: Killing case in Win Yay Township, October 2014," (August 2015)
- "Doooplaya Photo Set: Road construction in Kyainseikgyi and Win Yay townships, November 2014 to January 2015," (August 2015)

- “Doooplaya Situation Update: Kyainseikgyi, Kawkareik and Kyonedoe townships, January to February 2015,” (August 2015)

Dooplaya District



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